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Key KGB, GRU officers are targeted in expulsion

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Twenty-five Soviet diplomats expelled Wednesday from the United States are senior spies whose loss will severely disrupt international Soviet espionage operations, Reagan administration officials said yesterday.

The diplomats, stationed at three Soviet U.N. missions in New York, included the top officers who run New York espionage operations for the Soviet KGB and military GRU intelligence services, according to officials who asked not to be named.

The diplomats were ordered by the State Department to leave the nation by Oct. 1.

Administration officials also hinted that the expulsion order was linked, at least indirectly, to the recent arrest of American journalist Nicholas Daniloff in Moscow.

The "escalating deterioration" of U.S.-Soviet relations caused by the incident could be halted by allowing Mr. Daniloff to return home, officials said.

"The Soviets have the key to the solution in their pockets," one official said. "They're the ones who created the problem by their seizing Daniloff, and they're the ones who can solve it in an instant, if they want to."

The State Department, in announcing the expulsion order, said there is no relationship between the expelled diplomats — who have not been identified by name — and the Daniloff case.

Mr. Daniloff was arrested Aug. 30 and charged with espionage, apparently in retaliation for the Aug. 23 arrest in New York of Soviet U.N. employee Gennady Zakharov, who allegedly paid $1,000 to an FBI informant for classified documents on military jet engines.

Mr. Zakharov, who has been indicted in a federal court on three counts of espionage, last week was released into the custody of Soviet officials in New York in exchange for Mr. Daniloff's pretrial release in Moscow.

President Reagan, in March, issued an order to reduce by 105 the number of Soviet personnel at the United Nations. The reductions, which were to have been completed by 1987, were prompted by concerns over international espionage activities taking place under U.N. cover.

There are currently 243 Soviet diplomats, plus additional dependents, accredited to the Soviet, Ukrainian and Byelorussian U.N. missions.

Comments last weekend by Soviet U.N. Ambassador Alexander M. Belonogov, snubbing White House demands for staff reductions, prompted U.S. officials to target the suspected Soviet spies, officials said.

The Soviets also were warned that any recriminations for the 25 expelled diplomats would be met with further U.S. action, officials said.

When Mr. Zakharov was arrested, U.S. officials denied the action was taken without high-level administration consultations. The arrest was made, despite concern that it would sour U.S.-Soviet relations.

The officials described the expelled diplomats as experienced KGB and GRU officers who will not be easily replaced. They compared the expulsion order to similar measures taken by Western European governments in recent years.

Booting out senior spies will "completely sever" relations between the Soviet intelligence operatives and agents recruited by them, or who may be in the process of recruitment by the Soviets, one official said.

The expulsion also is expected to cause problems for the Soviets in making contact with agents under the control of the KGB and GRU officers.

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"Based on Western intelligence assessments of the loss of large numbers [of intelligence officers] — such as in England, in France, in Spain and in some of the other places they've lost large numbers — it has had some real major effects on their collection capabilities in those countries," the official said. "I'm sure somebody in Moscow Center is trying to figure out how the hell they're going to deal with this particular problem."

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